

Thure Kumlien and the early history of the Philadelphia Vireo.—Thure Kumlien, in the 1850's, recognized that one of the Wisconsin vireos differed from the Warbling Vireo (*Vireo gilvus*) but had no description of it, since the 1840 edition of Wilson by Brewer was his only ornithological reference book. Eventually the bird was determined to be the Philadelphia Vireo, but the history of this vireo in the 7 years following its discovery is a comedy of errors. Kumlien's observations have been underestimated in some quarters and overestimated in others. In 1921, P. V. Lawson wrote: "Why this rare and little known beauty of the orchard and forest was not properly given the name 'Kumlien Vireo' for its discoverer, the author cannot now ferret out. This late justice is accorded our modest naturalist."¹

Recently Mrs. H. A. Main gave to the Wisconsin Historical Society the correspondence between Thomas Mayo Brewer and Thure Kumlien. Though there are gaps in the correspondence, especially in the Kumlien series, it is now possible to trace Kumlien's work on this bird with considerable accuracy.

On February 11, 1851, John Cassin² read a paper before the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, in which he described as new a vireo (*Vireosylva philadelphica*) taken by him at Philadelphia in September 1842. It was the only specimen that he had seen. Curiously, he later failed to recognize Wisconsin specimens of the same species.

It is possible that prior to 1854 Kumlien was aware that he had a new vireo, but the records do not show this. He had been in correspondence with Brewer since 1851, and if his questions about the bird had arisen prior to 1854, it is reasonable to suppose that he would have mentioned them in his letters. In 1854 he sent specimens to Brewer and apparently wrote of his inability to identify them satisfactorily: on the back of a letter from Brewer to Kumlien, dated November 10, 1854, appears the notation by Kumlien, "About the Virio—to Brewer." On November 20 of the same year Brewer inquired, "Is not the other species you speak of the white-eyed vireo?" On the twenty-fifth of the following March (1855) Brewer wrote that he was visiting John Cassin and Spencer F. Baird, adding: "The other vireo, smaller than the gilvus is supposed to be a new species—Bell's vireo." Again, on May 10, Brewer wrote: "Shoot birds with their eggs and you may thus come at Bell's vireo with its eggs." Who was responsible for this misidentification cannot be determined. Audubon, in 1844, had described Bell's Vireo from a specimen shot by John G. Bell, May 6, 1843, while they were on the Missouri River expedition; but Kumlien did not have access to this description.

There was doubt in Kumlien's mind whether he had Bell's Vireo. A draft of a letter to Brewer, dated January 15, 1856, shows how his bird differed from the known vireos, and there appears the line: "? 7. *Virio Bellii?*." In 1903, L. Kumlien and N. Hollister published on this subject the following wholly erroneous statement: "In the early forties Thure Kumlien procured specimens of a vireo which he called *belli*, of which he had no description, simply to distinguish it from *gilvus*. This led to some confusion with Lawrence, Baird, and others who had not seen the specimens. The bird referred to was later described by Cassin as *V. philadelphicus*."³ Thure Kumlien did not find the vireo in the early forties, he did not name it *belli*, nor is there any clear evidence that he realized its distinctness before Cassin. No one in the east received any of Kumlien's skins until after Cassin had described the bird.

It will be shown below that Brewer received specimens of the Philadelphia Vireo from Kumlien in 1854. Others were forwarded to him in 1855. On January 11, 1856, Brewer wrote to Kumlien: "Nos. 5, 6 & 7 are vireo gilvus in an unusually fresh plumage." Kumlien was sure of his grounds, and his reply showed clearly the difference between his vireo and *gilvus*: "In regard to the Vireo which I sent you last being the *Vireo gilvus* 'in an unusually fresh plumage', I beg your perusal of the following remarks. You may think it bold in me, but so far as I read Wilson I am not satisfied in regard to this vireo matter.

"*Vireo gilvus*, Wilson—in every respect agreeing with Wilson's description—is common here from the 8th or 10th of May till September. It consequently breeds here. It is an excellent singer. I have a number of skins, and all agree in their markings. There is very little difference between its spring and autumnal dress. It is found in openings more than in thick timber, and frequently near farm-houses. Its length varies from $5\frac{1}{2}$ to 6 inches; I have one that measures full six. *Vireo* - ? — that which I sent you, and which cannot be *V. gilvus* if the preceding is—is by no means so common as the other, and I have never observed it before May 15th, and only from the 15th to the 25th of May and in September. I never heard this bird sing a note. It keeps in the most secluded thickets; I never found it anywhere else. It is a smaller bird than the other. Its length is from 5 to $5\frac{1}{4}$ inches, which is the longest I have ever found. I admit that in general markings both birds are very much alike, but the *gilvus* is a more slender bird than the other, which appears stouter. Between the spring and autumnal dress of the *gilvus*, as I have said, there is but little difference in the markings, but the other, in autumn, is considerably tinged with yellow."* Kumlien also showed the important difference between the two species in the length of the primaries.

The above letter was convincing, for Brewer wrote on April 14, 1856: "I would like to have you identify if you can your Vireos with their eggs. I am in hopes you may thus be able to clear up the present mystery, though the facts of your last letter satisfy me that Mr. Cassin must have been a little hasty in his examination of your specimens. After what you say there can be no doubt that the two species are distinct." Kumlien replied that he thought his vireo distinct "though I don't know if it has been discovered before I did or not." On September 29, 1856, Kumlien wrote Brewer regarding some skins that he had prepared, including "my vireo 1 in autumn dress."

Cassin had been quite hasty in his examination, for Brewer wrote to Kumlien on December 28, 1856: "I showed him [Cassin] what you wrote me about that Vireo. We consulted together about it and have no doubt that you are quite right about it. It is a new species described by Cassin . . . as *Vireosylvia Philadelphica*. Its genuineness has been disputed but now you have verified his correctness and I have prepared a paper for our Boston society in which I mean that you shall have all due credit. Get all the skins of this that you can. I think I can get some tall prices for them out of Bell and others."

Early in 1857 Kumlien wrote to Brewer: "So Mr. Cassin makes a new genus of my vireo! [Kumlien was familiar only with the genus *Vireo* in Wilson's book.] Has it been found anywhere else? And has he any other specimens than those in fall plumage? There is a deal of diff[erence] in spring & fall plumage. Last spring only one was shot and that was unfit for skinning. Singular that all I ever got were shot in one small thicket."

Brewer, on January 7, 1857, read a paper on *Vireosylvia* before the Boston Society of Natural History, in which he praised Kumlien for his keenness of observation: "Two years since [1854], my attention was called by Thure Kumlien, Esq., a very accurate and careful ornithologist of Wisconsin, to a specimen of *Vireosylvia* obtained by him near Lake Koskouong, in the southwestern [*sic*] part of that State. He thought it a distinct species from any he had seen any description of, and quite distinct from the *V. gilva*. I gave the specimen to a friend, upon whose judgment I relied more than . . . upon my own, who pronounced it a *V. gilva*. Mr. Kumlien was not satisfied with this decision, and still insisted that its habits, even more than its plumage and size, showed it to be a distinct species. The following year [1855] he sent me several specimens which I gave to Mr. Cassin, who had no doubt that they were of the species he had described as *V. Philadelphica*, though others to whom I showed them were still unconvinced. In answer to a letter in which I informed Mr. Kumlien that his birds were supposed to be the *V. gilva* in an unusually fresh plumage, he wrote me the answer which I give

below. It proves, to my mind, conclusively his correctness, establishing the species to be a good one, distinct from *V. gilva* and identical with that described by Mr. Cassin as *V. Philadelphica*. I take the greatest pleasure in thus giving Mr. Kumlien the credit of having worked it out, unaided by any suggestion or help from any one, in view of the disadvantages under which he labors in the want of access to any text-books. His letter is interesting, as throwing the first light that has yet been given to the public upon the habits and distribution of this new and little known species."⁵

Brewer wrote to Kumlien on May 1, 1857: "In the second place he [Cassin] will give you . . . 50 cents each for as many of the vireo philadelphica as you can procure. . . . He wants you particularly to send him specimens of *vireo gilvus*, just to demonstrate finally that you know the species, though of this he has not a doubt. . . . He is pleased to compliment my paper about the vireo philadelphica in which I publish your letter to me written a year ago." There is an element of humor in Cassin's solicitude over Kumlien's ability to recognize *V. gilvus* when he himself did not distinguish Kumlien's specimens of *philadelphicus* from those of *gilvus*. In this connection it is curious that Kumlien should have recognized *philadelphicus* as a new species and at the same time confused *gilvus* (the Warbling Vireo) with so well marked a species as *solitarius* (the Blue-headed). After examining with Baird a shipment of skins from Kumlien, Brewer wrote to Kumlien on October 26, 1854, that "No. 5 and 6 are not vireo solitarius but vireo gilvus."

The classic ninth volume of the Pacific Railroad Survey (1858), by Baird, Cassin, and Lawrence, lists four specimens of *Vireo philadelphicus* from Dane County, Wisconsin (Nos. 6842, 4333, 4334, and 6841). I wrote Alexander Wetmore of the Smithsonian Institution for further data on these specimens. He kindly replied as follows:

"With regard to No. 6842, Baird made a curious error in connection with this specimen since it comes from Rockport, Illinois and reached us from Kirtland.

"As for the others, Nos. 4333, 4334 have identical data coming from Dane County, Wisconsin, spring 1854 and listed as 'obtained from' Dr. T. M. Brewer. They were entered in the catalogue October 24, 1854, as '*Vireo gilvus*'?

"No. 6841 comes from Dane County, Wisconsin, September 1855. 'Obtained from' Th. Kumlien. This was catalogued in 1857 as '*Vireo philadelphicus*'?

"None of these specimens is now to be found in our collections."

It is obvious that it was only through Kumlien's persistence that sufficient attention was drawn to the above specimens to have them entered in the Railroad Report as *philadelphicus*.

It would have been well had the vireo affair ended at this point, but this was not to be. Kumlien, in 1859, sent to Henry Bryant, of Boston, some birds' eggs and skins that Bryant had ordered. On November 29, 1859, Bryant wrote a criticism of the quality of the work done on the specimens. Apparently in atonement, he added: "I was informed by several people that it was in consequence of your observation that Cassin was led to describe *V. philadelphia* and therefore consider you as the discoverer if not the describer." In the Kumlien correspondence is a scrap of paper on which is written to Bryant, evidently in December, 1859, "It pleased you to state in one of your letters that you considered me the discoverer of *V[ireo] P[hiladelphia]*. Please do tell me why you think so." Bryant's reply, if made, cannot be found. On February 13, 1862, Kumlien wrote to H. Schlegel, Leiden, Holland: "Is not *Vireo philadelphia* (I was the first that found that bird) . . . desirable . . . ?"

Brewer, February 9, 1871, asked Kumlien, "Will you oblige me by giving me all the information you can in regard to *Vireo philadelphia*? What time it arrives in spring or goes in fall, if any remain to breed, its song, wildness or tameness, etc, etc." When writing on the Philadelphia Vireo in 1875, Brewer stated that he was informed by Thure Kumlien that he "has been familiar with this Vireo since 1849, and has collected it every year since that period. . . ." ⁶ Whether the date

1849 should stand is not now determinable. Evidently Kumlien did not collect this vireo every year, for in a letter to Carl Gustaf Lowenhielm, written in 1859, he said: "I haven't this year nor last found one Vireo Philadelph., so if you have not sold all the specimens, it will be wise to not sell them for under price."

Kumlien, as we have seen, came very near being the discoverer of a new species. He knew far more about the bird we now call the Philadelphia Vireo than did Cassin, who named it. Though he cannot be credited with the discovery, Kumlien, through his accurate observations, convinced eastern ornithologists that this vireo was a good species.

References:

- ¹ P. V. Lawson, *Trans. Wis. Acad. Sci.*, 20 (1921):679.
- ² John Cassin, *Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Phila.*, 5 (1851):153.
- ³ L. Kumlien and N. Hollister, *Bull. Wis. Nat. Hist. Soc.*, 3 (1903):133.
- ⁴ T. Kumlien, *Proc. Boston Soc. Nat. Hist.*, 6 (1859):109-110.
- ⁵ T. M. Brewer, *op. cit.*:109.
- ⁶ S. F. Baird, T. M. Brewer, and R. Ridgway, *North American Birds*. Boston, vol. 1 (1875):367-368.

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The Evening Grosbeak in Kentucky.—Since March 1887, when Leon O. Pindar recorded the Evening Grosbeak (*Hesperiphona vespertina*) in the vicinity of Hickman, Fulton County, Kentucky, there has been no record of this species from the State. Pindar (1887, *Auk*, 4:257) observed a small group March 18, 22, 23, and 25, 1887. He saw seven on the last date and apparently collected three. Our efforts to locate these specimens have so far been in vain. There are three specimens of this finch taken just outside of our borders, near Cincinnati, Ohio, March 6, 1911, and two taken in the same locality June 8, 1911 (Woodrow Goodpaster, 1941, *Jour. Cincinnati Soc. Nat. Hist.*, 22:34).

On February 24, 1946, we collected an adult male Evening Grosbeak at Anchorage, Jefferson County, Kentucky. It was sitting all alone in a tree beside Monroe's house. A careful search of the neighborhood failed to disclose more of its kind. The specimen was very fat.

The collection of this specimen definitely establishes the Evening Grosbeak's place on the Kentucky list as a rare, or casual, straggler. The record is of special interest in connection with the marked invasion of Evening Grosbeaks in the northeastern states this winter.—BURT L. MONROE, *Anchorage, Kentucky*, and ROBERT M. MENGEL, *Cornell University, Ithaca, New York*.

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE WILSON ORNITHOLOGICAL CLUB:

The Annual Meeting of the Wilson Ornithological Club will be held in Omaha, Nebraska, November 29 to 30. A more detailed announcement will appear in the Secretary's letter, which all Members will soon receive, and in the September issue of the *Bulletin*.

Members should be considering what papers they will present, for the titles will be requested in the Secretary's letter above referred to. Information concerning drawings of birds made by men in uniform during the war should be given the Secretary, in case a special exhibit of these can be arranged.

Omaha is admittedly not a centrally located point, but the invitation to meet there was most cordial, certain more easterly cities are faced with a bad housing problem at the moment, and the opportunity to meet with the recently re-affiliated Nebraska Ornithologists' Union is one we cannot afford to miss.

George Miksch Sutton, *President*